B. The Altars

778 794 Each family head wears a small altar, called kere la boli ni (literally, little side altar), which maintains relations with the souls of the members of the family for which he is, in part, responsible. /132/ In case of illness he offers sacrifices on this boli for the recovery of the patient. In case of death, he keeps the soul in it temporarily before carrying it to the collective altar of the Komo (1). He also sacrifices on this

1. The society, the altars, and the role of the Komo are described on pages ff.

altar at the time of sowing.

[763] If the family head is himself very ill, the altar is placed on his head in an effort to replace the soul which is escaping with that which the altar contains. If he dies, it is placed on his chest to take in the [744] soul which is then transported to the sanctuary of the Komo. At the end of seven days, the object is given to the deceased's eldest son who, upon becoming family head, sacrifices two goats to the Komo on this occasion.

The ɔuafebla (literally, worn at the hip) is made by a father for his son when the latter attains maturity and is on the point of leading a man's life, farming his own field and founding a family.

If there is no Komo in the village, the father may make it earlier, right after the name-giving ceremony.

The altar is made of hyena tails, scorpion tails, and whole peppers tied with a little stick; it represents the owner's flesh and blood.

It receives an annual sacrifice at the time of sowing after the collective offering tothe Komo. This takes place in the family courtyard in the presence of all the members of the family (2). Moreover,

778/ 794 773 241 2. The cult rendered on this altar brings the intervention of the Sago spirit whose agricultural role is still obscure at the present stage of the inquiry. He taught men how to water their fields.

"Two birds konodyanfi began to circle and sing above the workers in the fields;

764 were kept by the village patriarch and the cult of the ancestors was celebrated upon these altars.

At the present time, the body is buried during rites in which the Komo plays an important role for the initiates. As soon as a member is seriously ill, the family head places upon the dying man's chest 763 778 the portable altar, kere la boli ni, which belongs to the community. He does not leave the bedside in order to catch the last breath. Immediately after death, without turning back or saying a word to anyone, he goes to the chief of the Komo who places the object in the [775] sanctuary where the altars are kept. The soul is introduced into the nimara boli (1).

[843]

1. See p. 192. In former times, the soul of the dead man was caught between two gourds which were then joined together and hung on the conjugal bed. When the woman became pregnant, the gourds were broken over her abdomen in order to make the soul penetrate the foetus. Later on this method of transmission of the soul was no longer possible because of the impurity brought about by "frivolous discussions regarding the arrangements and situations of creation."

764 Upon his return to the house of the deceased, the family head brushes his hand over the dead man's face to gather his nyama which he then entrusts to Pemba by rubbing the cavity in the family pembele "so that the total of the work he has accomplished during his life will not be dissolved by death, but will be like /190/ an accumulated force serving the community, and so that his intelligence, his qualities, and his skill in different kinds of work, especially in agriculture, will not be lost but will be found in other members of the family. The [778] block of wood, acting as an altar for storing the forces, preserves this nyama until a new birth occurs in the family" (2).

2. S. De Ganay, "Aspects de mythologie et de symbolique bambara," p. 199.

845
783

2. Ni nya ke ɲyɛ̃ fla i ka n fa; ka kadi ka kago, gariseke bo fã ka cã; faro (ter).

The water swallowed after these words constitutes a solemn promise to Faro not to repeat the fault.

Next, they are carried home, the man by two members of the society and the woman by three of her companions, so that their toes, [824] the temporary lodging places of the spiritual principles which have returned to them, may not touch the impure earth. They remain three and four days, respectively, on their mats without making a movement. On the seventeenth day, with a thousand precautions, they may resume a more normal life, but they will be entirely free only when a birth occurring in the family will eliminate from their bodies the soul and the double of the dead child by transferring these to the newborn.

/199/ Death of an Uncircumcised Boy

763 When an uncircumcised boy is seriously ill the chief of the ndomo (1) has a rooster sacrificed in order to find out if recovery is possible.

1. See p. 222.

In the case of a negative response the children, taking turns night and day, go into the bush and sound off the ritual objects under the leadership of an initiate. In this way the soul of the dying boy is certain to be captured at the moment of death and channeled by the sound wave and led into the ritual objects themselves. Two initiates are posted near the home of the sick and, as soon as they learn of his death, they go to warn the children in the bush to make them stop playing. The chief sits down facing the west and recites a prayer; then he sacrifices the victims offered by the family.

766 Before the corpse is buried, it is circumcised, and the wanzo goes [304] to settle in the mask of the ndomo. During the night following the burial the members go to the fresh grave and sound the ritual instruments which contain the soul. Each year they repeat this action above the children's graves following the threshing of the harvest to "awaken the dead and to tell them that their souls are not lost."

787 With the same equipment the diviner sometimes operates differently. Setting the gourd firmly on the crown that supports it, he then taps it two or three times with his middle finger. Then, it is claimed, he can hear special sounds, which are revelations by the water-spirit and which he alone can understand.

In short, there is an endless number of divining practices and here, if anywhere, the old saw which says that the spirit blows where, when and how it listeth, is singularly appropriate. And nothing is more accommodating than human credulity. It [198] goes without saying that there are some remarkable ventriloquists among the Bambara, who give such talented support to inanimate objects that the latter become veritable oracles. A piece of horn stuck into the ground or a mute block of wood are thus transformed through such artifice into mediums that answer anyone on any subject.

[828] There are also many highly suggestible individuals who [154] readily fall into wakeful or hypnotic states, during which they reveal hidden things.

787 Another practice among the Bambara is the use of the ●763 kolon' kala (1) which is specially amenable to hypnotic sugges-

[412]

1. This is the wooden pestle used in all native kitchens to crush grain and condiments.

tion. When a suspicious death requires search for a murderer, the corpse is often used for the discovery. It is carried on the heads of [138] two impressionable young men, who are then assumed to be possessed by the soul of the deceased. The lugubrious remains are rapidly borne through the settlement or the countryside, disregarding obstacles, until it finally stops of itself at a spot where the murderer or some revelatory sign is to be found.

787 A kind of effigy is often used instead of a corpse. This is made of a kolon' kala to which is tied a little bag containing bits of the body (finger-nails, hair, etc.) and which is wrapped in a cloth. The effigy plays the role of the corpse.

769 continuity is established between the living and the dead, with the deceased acting as intermediary. Religious customs, magic, and civil law, all are intermingled in apparent disorder, and the casual or inexperienced observer is all the more confused inasmuch as diverse accessory or circumstantial features mask the essentials in being more obvious. [164]

Does not the same sort of confusion confront a foreigner in France who sees the funeral of a prominent citizen? If he is uninformed, how is he to recognize the religious rites and civil requirements which form the common basis of all funeral ceremonies, for the great and for the humble, brought to their highest development for the one, reduced to their absolute minimum for the other.

764 Therefore, the important thing to show here is the substratum on which all funeral observances rest. For the sake of clarity, we shall divide the period of 40 days into four phases: (a) from death to burial; (b) burial; (c) the funeral celebration; (d) the period of mourning.

763 (a) From death to burial. As soon as death occurs, the fact is announced to everyone by appropriate means.

The lamentations of the women burst forth, and this spreads the news in the immediate vicinity, while gunshots inform the whole settlement. These acts have something of the ritual that was carried out when a Bambara died in war. Raffenel has given us a remarkable picture of it.

763 "When a Bambara died in battle, three gunshots, fired near the door of his hut by one of his companions-at-arms, an-
152 nounced his death to the family. Wailings answered this announcement, and the weeping women of the village came out of all the huts to run to the house from where the signal had been heard. Everything was abandoned in order to share in this sorrow. First they wept, and then they ran to find out where the mourning was...

763 "The warrior charged with this mission arrived at the door at a gallop. He pulled up his horse, slowly loaded his gun, shot it, reloaded it again, then again... , and when the third shot had rung out, he rode off with equal speed, without uttering a word, without giving a single detail... Two shots announced enslavement."

763 A gunshot today most likely signals the death of a hunter or the father of a hunter. In any case, however, there are always cries and vociferations by [165] the women, who are joined by their friends, relatives, and neighbors.

Horsemen ride off to notify any of the sons of the deceased who are away.

[567] Meanwhile, the chief of the slaves, the major-domo, the confidential agent, or a friend or neighbor of the deceased goes to inform the chief and the principal men in the village.

764 These personages come to the mortuary house at once, spear in hand. After being received by the man temporarily in charge of the house, they go to the deceased to discover his identity and at the same time express their condolences to the family represented by the person who received them; then they withdraw.

In the mortuary hut silence descends while the women prepare the body. They wash it with warm water usually [824] scented with basil, su-ko-la (Ocimum album and febrifugum); they dry it and wrap it in pieces of native white cotton material or else dress it in its own garments, likewise white. A mat [285] of coarse straw (tyekala, kara) is placed in the middle of the room. A fine, flexible mat made of iphène leaves is put on top of it, and the women lay out the corpse on the second mat. Sometimes they place a grindstone on the abdomen to keep it from swelling.

When these preparations are completed, the women, [352 516] dressed in white native cloth, sit down in the native fashion on tiny stools in the mortuary hut. Those who come in from outside give evidence of terrible grief: they cry out, they weep, [152] they cover their heads with a bit of cloth and hurry toward the mortuary hut. As soon as they enter, they become quiet and stop weeping.

152 764 767 Among the Bambara grief is never silent; it is customary to show it overtly. As soon as there is a crowd, the singing begins, in rhythm to the clapping of hands. One person or another will be inspired to sing of the achievements and virtues of the deceased. Professional weepers and mourners mingle with the crowd, guiding and gradually encouraging the noisy display.

764 The provisional master takes his place at the door or inside the blon', the vestibule of the house, and receives the condolences. [166]

Several days elapse between death and burial in order to give distant or absent relatives time to arrive. During this period the funeral songs become more and more elaborate and [533] are left to professional singers who are accompanied by various instruments: tom-toms, xylophones (bala), guitars. The singers, dancers, and mourners exert themselves all the more if they think there will be substantial rewards.

The children of the house (den'-u, de-u) are allowed a good deal of freedom during this period, as though the authority which had curbed them had ended with the life of the deceased. They are allowed to take hens and goats, to eat lavishly, sing, dance, and generally rejoice.

On the night preceding the burial, the deceased is placed outside under a shelter (gwa); the songs and dances [857] continue. It is customary for the children (de-u) of the house, led by the professional members of the funeral orchestra, to take part in the singing and dancing.

Relatives, friends, neighbors, and persons obligated to the family are expected to bring offerings in proportion to their rank or indebtedness so as to contribute to the meals and to [689] the funeral alms. This is a very strict obligation; any failure to comply not only shows a lack of respect for the dead, but is also an offense which the family must avenge. The chronicle of Ségou bears witness to this fact.

● 763 764 Along with the religious ceremonies, events of an entirely different nature take place. If the death should seem in any way suspicious, it is the duty of the family to investigate the matter without delay. It is particularly the heir presumptive, if he is present, who is required to take steps at once to clarify the matter; he questions the ancestors and consults seers and magicians. The funeral ceremonies are sometimes dominated and even conditioned by the results of these investigations and consultations. At the very least, it would be essential to obtain the lifting of the interdict imposed on the

763 deceased in case he had been killed by a genie (nyana). Sacri-
764 fices, alms, or the payment of a fine are necessary in that event, along with intervention by the priest of the nyana in question.

764 Most often, the body is turned over to a priest (nyana-n-tigi) [167] if the deceased was a member of a brotherhood.

[735] In any event, it is customary to give alms at the crossroads near the village.

768 Further, the death of the fa puts an end (1) to the au-
357

1. When a king of Kaarta died, the interruption in sovereignty often gave rise to serious anarchic disturbances.

thority held by him, and this may have serious consequences, since for the moment everyone is virtually independent. That is why the servitor who had the master's confidence and who actually ran the establishment retains his role after taking certain precautions (2). In particular he must make sure that the

2. This was the role that Ngolo Dyâra was seeking when he asked to be placed as "guard at the master's door."

movable property of the deceased is not carried off. He is familiar with these things, and he is the guardian responsible for them. He makes the women return the gold jewelry and valuable fabrics, puts everything in a safe place, and makes an inventory in the presence of the heir presumptive.

764 (b) Burial. The deceased may be buried in the ground within his hut or at least in a corner of his establishment. In former times there was a cemetery outside the village, often near the grove of the nyana dugu-da-siri (guardian genie of the village), and in such cases it was apparent that the more important the deceased, the nearer his romb to the sacred place.

766 For persons of distinction there is usually a special kind
764 of grave. It is about two meters long, and while the opening

596 614 787 It is the duty of the fa to see to the cult. He projects everything that happens to him personally to the supernatural plane so as to come to conclusions that will guide his own conduct. He discerns in the most ordinary dreams indications of what will please the dead. Furthermore, the people around him point out the signs of divine will that they have observed. If, as happens in great houses, the fa is obliged to turn over part of his responsibility to the family gods to one of his confidantes, the latter will not fail to keep him informed of anything significant that may be revealed.

[577] Thus, daily life is unceasingly dominated by the supernatural, and every important event is conditioned by these beliefs. This is readily seen in all the family institutions: birth, circumcision, marriage, and death.

[577] It follows that the moral behavior of the family is a concern of the fa. Whenever something abnormal or painful occurs, the fa looks into it. Do the dead perhaps have reason to be dissatisfied? Have they been neglected or offended? He questions them, and if he finds confirmation for his suspicions, he at once seeks to appease the manes in whatever way they desire. If the trouble persists, he investigates further, and sometimes everyone in the house is questioned or, if one prefers, made to confess, even infants. Could one of them, moved by ill feeling, have uttered maledictions when invoking the dead?

614 596 783 [578] When the fa himself is ill, this general confession is virtually obligatory. This is because the absolute authority of a fa can hardly fail to arouse hatred, and hatred, a bad counselor, makes people resort to magic to rob the more powerful of life. Fear that the elder's "clairvoyance" will discover the wickedness in the depths of one's soul and punish it usually induces the guilty person to obtain a pardon for his wrongdoing by confessing it, and then everything returns to normal.

596 614 Upon the death of the fa, it is the first duty of his successor to try to discover, by any means, the causes of death and to avenge it if need be.

● [763] Everything which the old fa was wont to honor, which forms the spiritual treasure [180] of the family, must also be

761 principles of the cadaver on altars or masks in order to preserve them
764 for the community.

The rites have undergone an evolution. Formerly the bodies
764 were hung from trees until they rotted, while the bones were kept. At present the bodies are buried. Only a band of cotton symbolizing the tongue of the deceased, that is, his word, is attached to the branch of a tree. If the deceased was an initiate of the Komo, the
[764] society plays an important role in the funeral rites.

All these rites have been studied by G. Dieterlen and Tauxier.
766 Monteil has described at great length the funeral ceremonies of a chief: the three rifle shots recalling his combats, the lamentations of the women, the notification of the village notables, the offerings of relatives and friends, the alms at the crossroads, and finally, the inhumation. The body is prepared, the head shaved, the interior cleaned with water and salt. A paste of water and ground cowry is put into the body openings (the ground cowries possess a divine spirit assuring the preservation of the cadaver). The body, and particularly the head, is daubed with this same paste, then the body is laid on its right side, feet to the north (a woman would be laid on her left side). Finally, the funeral celebration takes place, with the ritual feast
765 and the purifications. Seven days later the celebration of commemoration (Sangha) takes place, followed by the mourning of the women for forty days. After this time the deceased is transformed into a living ancestor.

763 The Bambara receive omens of their death or of a chief's death from certain signs given them in the bush, such as coming across a chameleon on a red anthill, the cry of a certain mythical hyena, the passing of certain crying monkeys or certain birds.

Certain gifted beings have the ability to perceive the departure of a person's spiritual forces and his imminent death. Sometimes they are able to bring back these forces and reinstate them in the body to save the man in danger.

[95] g. Ancestor Worship

769 After his death a man is transformed into a living ancestor
775 and is the object of a cult. The cult is closely connected to the agricultural cults; the ancestors are efficient vital forces which